

Message Text

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ACTION SS-30

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /031 W

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R 092051Z OCT 74

FM AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 635

S E C R E T SANTIAGO 6180

EXDIS

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: CI, US, PFOR, MILI, SHUM

SUBJECT: CHILEAN REQUESTS FOR ARMS ASSISTANCE

REFS: (A) STATE 220331; (B) SANTIAGO 5805

1. SUMMARY: DEFMIN BONILLA CONVEYS APPRECIATION FOR OUR EXPRESSION OF HOPE FOR A FAVORABLE USG RESPONSE TO CHILEAN REQUESTS FOR M-48 TANKS AND TOWS WITHIN NEXT TWO MONTHS. EMPHASIZING DECREASE IN NUMBER OF INTERNAL SECURITY DETAINEES, HE DEFENDS NEED FOR STRINGENT METHODS IN COPING WITH VIOLENT EXTREMISTS, BUT DISPLAYS UNDERSTANDING FOR OUR CONGRESSIONAL AND MEDIA PROBLEM IN MONTHS AHEAD. END SUMMARY.

2. SINCE DEPT'S INSTRUCTION, FOR WHICH WE ARE GRATEFUL, STOPPED SHORT OF SPECIFIC COMMITMENTS, I DECIDED APPROPRIATE LEVEL FOR DEMARCHE AUTHORIZED THEREIN WOULD BE DEFENSE MINISTER GEN. OSCAR BONILLA. ACCORDINGLY, I SAW HIM ON OCT 9, WITH CHIEF OF US MILGP (CAPT DAVIS) PRESENT.

3. I CAREFULLY COMMUNICATED SUBSTANCE OF PARAS 2 TO 5 OF INSTRUCTION TO BONILLA. HE EXPRESSED GREAT SATISFACTION WITH REGARD TO INDICATIONS THAT WITHIN NEAR FUTURE WAY WOULD BE OPEN FOR PURCHASE OF TANKS AND TOWS. HE TOOK OUR POINT THAT OUR WILLINGNESS TO STRENGTHEN CHILEAN ARMY IN THIS WAY, AT A TIME OF SHORTAGES IN OUR OWN FORCES AND OTHER DIFFICULTIES, IS BASED ON OUR SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY TO HELP PRESERVE HEMI-SPHERE STABILITY. HE ASSERTED THAT CHILEANS HAD NO MILITARY

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AIMS AGAINST PERU, AND NO REASON WHATEVER TO ATTACK ANY OF

CHILE'S NEIGHBORS. HE UNDERSTOOD THAT IN ENTERTAINING THE CHILEAN ARMS REQUEST, OUR PURPOSE WAS DETERRENCE.

4. BONILLA SAID HE WOULD COMMUNICATE OUR MESSAGE DIRECTLY TO THE JUNTA. HE HAD NO DOUBT THAT IT WOULD BE FULLY APPRECIATED. TIME-FRAMES MENTIONED WOULD BE HELPFUL FOR CHILEAN PLANNING PURPOSES.

5. TURNING NEXT TO WHAT I HAD SAID IN REGARD TO THE HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE, BONILLA OFFERED BOTH A JUSTIFICATION AND A PLEA FOR UNDERSTANDING. HE POINTED OUT THAT THERE HAD BEEN VAST CHANGES IN INTERNAL SECURITY PROCEDURES IN CHILE SINCE THE EARLY DAYS OF THE JUNTA. THE NUMBER OF DETAINEES ON SECURITY GROUNDS WAS BEING STEADILY REDUCED. IMMEDIATELY, THOSE BEING RELEASED WERE PEOPLE WHO HAD BEEN HELD WITHOUT SPECIFIC CHARGES, BUT RELEASES OF THOSE CHARGED AND PERHAPS EVEN THOSE SENTENCED WOULD EVENTUALLY TAKE PLACE. DETENTION CENTERS SUCH AS THE NATIONAL STADIUM, PISAGUA AND CHACABUCO HAD BEEN OR WERE BEING CLOSED. THE NUMBER OF THOSE NEWLY DETAINED FOR SECURITY REASONS HAD NOW FALLEN TO ONLY ONE OR TWO A DAY. BECAUSE OF COMPLAINTS ABOUT TORTURE, IT WAS NOW A PRACTICE OF THE CHILEAN SECURITY AUTHORITIES TO HAVE A DOCTOR EXAMINE ALL THOSE ENTERING OR LEAVING DETENTION CENTERS, TO DETERMINE WHETHER THEY HAD BEEN PHYSICALLY ABUSED.

6. CONTINUING, BONILLA SAID THE WHOLE BUSINESS OF SECURITY DETENTION WAS DISTASTEFUL TO THE JUNTA. IT WAS EXPENSIVE, IT ABSORBED THE ENERGIES OF TOO MANY PEOPLE, AND IT PROVOKED SHARP AND UNJUSTIFIED REACTIONS. UNFORTUNATELY, AS A RESULT OF LEFTIST PROPAGANDA, THE OUTSIDE WORLD HAD A VISION OF RIVERS OF BLOOD RUNNING IN CHILE -- AN OBVIOUS ABSURDITY. HE, BONILLA, WOULD LIKE PERSONALLY TO INVITE ANY US SENATORS CONCERNED TO COME TO CHILE AND CONFIRM FOR THEMSELVES WHAT THE SITUATION WAS LIKE HERE TODAY. IF THEY, OR ANY ONE ELSE, WOULD GIVE HIM CONCRETE CASES OF ABUSE OR OF DISREGARD FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, HE WOULD HAVE THE MATTER INVESTIGATED IMMEDIATELY. AT THE OUTSET OF THE COUP, IT HAD BEEN NECESSARY TO USE THE EMERGENCY PROVISIONS OF THE CHILEAN CONSTITUTION TO SUPPLANT NORMAL LEGAL SAFEGUARDS FOR DETAINEES, BUT THIS SITUATION HAD CHANGED AND WAS CHANGING VERY SIGNIFICANTLY.

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7. AT THE SAME TIME, BONILLA POINTED OUT, A SERIOUS INTERNAL SECURITY THREAT STILL EXISTED IN CHILE. THIS WAS PROVED BY THE OCT 5 RAID ON A HIDEOUT OF THE VIOLENT LEFTIST MIR (MOVEMENT OF THE REVOLUTIONARY LEFT) ORGANIZATION. IN THE HOUSE WHERE THE MIR LEADER MIGUEL ENRIQUEZ HAD BEEN KILLED, THE AUTHORITIES HAD FOUND AN ARSENAL OF AUTOMATIC WEAPONS. THEY WERE CONSTANTLY FINDING OTHER CLANDESTINE ARMS STOCKS. THE WORLD HAD TO UNDERSTAND THAT IT WAS NOT POSSIBLE TO DEAL WITH TERRORIST

OPPONENTS AS IF A SITUATION OF NORMALCY PREVAILED. THE MIR AND THEIR LIKES HAD NO CONCERN FOR HUMAN RIGHTS. THEY USED THE HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE TO GAIN SUPPORT FROM OTHERS. FOR EXAMPLE, THEY AND OTHER LEFTISTS HAD FLOODED THE COURTS WITH HABEAS CORPUS (AMPARO) REQUESTS ON BEHALF OF NON-EXISTENT INDIVIDUALS, TO CREATE THE IMPRESSION THAT THOUSANDS WERE BEING UNLAWFULLY DETAINED.

8. IN RESPONSE TO BONILLA'S REMARKS I AGREED THAT CHILE'S INTERNAL SECURITY PROBLEMS WERE OFTEN IGNORED OR MISUNDERSTOOD OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY. WHAT SEEMED TO ME IMPORTANT WAS TO CONTINUE THE TREND TOWARD MORE NORMAL PRACTICES. I APPLAUDED THE LARGE-SCALE RELEASE OF DETAINEES NOW TAKING PLACE. EVERY MOVE IN THIS DIRECTION WAS HELPFUL IN COPING WITH THE CONGRESSIONAL DIFFICULTIES I HAD CITED IN MY PRESENTATION. BONILLA SAID HE UNDERSTOOD.

9. IN NOTING THE DESIRABILITY OF DISCRETION IN CONNECTION WITH ARMS PURCHASES, I DISCUSSED WITH BONILLA INTERNATIONAL NEWS REPORTS OF THE CHILEAN PURCHASE OF F-5S AND A-37S. HE REALIZES THE POTENTIAL PROBLEM WHICH COULD ARISE IF THERE WERE PREMATURE PUBLICITY FOR THE PURCHASES NOW CONTEMPLATED, PARTICULARLY DURING THE NEXT SIXTY DAYS.

10. COMMENT: I BELIEVE OUR MESSAGE WILL HELP TO ASSUAGE CHILEAN FEARS AND SUSPICIONS AND TO PRODUCE A MORE RELAXED APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM OF SECURITY VIS-A-VIS PERU. IT WILL BE STILL MORE EFFECTIVE IF WE CAN GIVE CHILEANS GO-AHEAD SIGNALS FOR ACQUISITION OF MEANINGFUL QUANTITIES OF M-48S AND TOWS EVEN BEFORE PERIODS MENTIONED IN REFTEL A EXPIRE.

11. ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS DISCUSSION, BONILLA'S REMARKS MUST BE VIEWED IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF CHILEAN LEGALISMS. JUNTA HAS MADE
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A CASE THAT ALL ITS INTERNAL SECURITY MEASURES ARE JUSTIFIED UNDER LONG-STANDING PROVISIONS OF CHILEAN CONSTITUTION, WHICH ALLOW A GOVERNMENT TO SUSPEND VIRTUALLY ALL HUMAN RIGHTS GUARANTEES IN TIME OF WAR OR EMERGENCY. IT IS A CASE WHICH MANY CHILEAN LAWYERS CHALLENGE, BUT IT IS JUNTA ORTHODOXY, AND IT IS THE BASIS FOR BONILLA'S PROTESTATIONS. AT THE SAME TIME, IT IS CLEAR TO ME THAT HE GRASPS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CRITICAL NEWS REPORTS AND CONGRESSIONAL ACTION. BONILLA IS KNOWN AS A RELATIVE MODERATE IN CHILEAN GOVERNMENT CIRCLES, AND I BELIEVE HE WILL EXERT HIS INFLUENCE IN FAVOR OF RESTRAINT.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MILITARY PROCUREMENT, MILITARY ASSISTANCE, HUMAN RIGHTS, ANTITANK WEAPONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 09 OCT 1974
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: elyme
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974SANTIA06180
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740287-0866
From: SANTIAGO
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19741059/aaaabysz.tel
Line Count: 165
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: (A) STATE 220331; (B) SANTIAGO 5805
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: elyme
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 10 SEP 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <10 SEP 2002 by boyleja>; APPROVED <05 MAR 2003 by elyme>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CHILEAN REQUESTS FOR ARMS ASSISTANCE
TAGS: PFOR, MILI, SHUM, CI, US
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005